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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ ACCUSES PRESIDENT BUSH OF BEING INTOXICATED
AT THE OLYMPICS, CALLS HIM "FACE OF VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION"

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) President Chavez called President Bush, "the face of the Venezuelan opposition," and said he deserved a "gold medal for drunkenness" during an August 21 interview with a Venezuelan state television talk show. During the live coverage, Chavez presented still photos of President Bush viewing an Olympic event in China where he appeared to have lost his balance as well as another unflattering photograph of the President. Urging the cameraman to focus on the photos, Chavez repeatedly accused the American president of public intoxication.

Comment

¶2. (C) While President Chavez regularly attacks senior USG officials in his public appearances, his most recent remarks were particularly egregious. Chavez appeared to be in full election-posturing mode during the interview, insisting, as he did during the December 2007 referendum, that President Bush was the "leader" of the Venezuelan opposition. In addition, Chavez appears to be trying to frame a non-presidential vote, in this case the November mayoral and gubernatorial elections, as a referendum on his presidency.

¶3. (C) Chavez's latest outburst is entirely inconsistent with his July 5 public overture to the Ambassador on the need to renew bilateral counternarcotics cooperation. His remarks coincide with the Caracas visit of Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter and the BRV's decision to fend off a visit by Office of National Drug Control Policy Director John Walters, who had offered to meet with Chavez to discuss counternarcotics cooperation.

DUDDY